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A glimpse at the works

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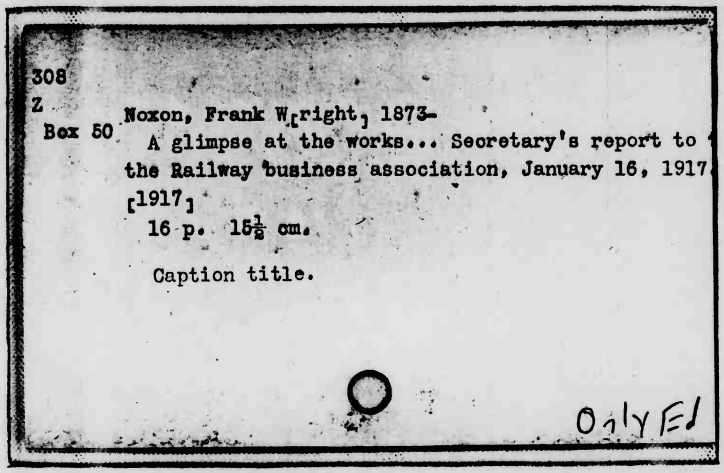
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A glimpse at the works... Secretary's report to the Railway business association, January 16, 1917.
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Gift of the President

# A Glimpse at the Works

BY

FRANK W. NOXON

Secretary's Report to the Railway Business Association January 16, 1917

WHAT does the Railway Business Association do? This is a question which those invited to join us ask. We have been paid the compliment of inquiries regarding our routine operation from other organizations. Some of our officers have raised the question whether our members themselves in general really know what is being done in their name and with their money. This report aims to supply some of that information.

You employ a staff all of which is located at the headquarters in New York. It consists of a secretary, an executive assistant, a treasurer who gives us part of his time, a chief clerk who is a woman, two other stenographers, one of

whom operates the telephone, and a boy. In rush time this force is temporarily somewhat enlarged.

*Co-ordination of Energies*

The foremost duty of the staff is to co-ordinate the energies of the General Executive Committee and facilitate the carrying out of the policy. To that end the staff works in touch with sources of intelligence in our field and reports periodically to the Committee the progress of events and apparent opportunities for promoting our purposes.

Certain authorities are seen regularly. These include specialists among our membership, in the railway organizations and elsewhere. They also embrace officers of government at Washington and in the various states, and representatives of business organizations, especially the National Industrial Traffic League and the Chamber of Commerce of the United States. This intercourse involves travel as well as correspondence. Our Committee expects to be made familiar with questions and phases long before reaching the stage of utterance or action. Research, in other words, is initiated by the staff or suggested by members, and is the basis for deliberate consideration betimes. When the hour arrives for dealing with any matter the accumulated knowledge, in the light of the discussions which have been held, is summarized for the board, with tentative plans of action.



*President, Staff and Committee*

In this phase of the work, "policy-making," our Associations differs from most others in an important respect. The President is able and willing to devote more time than most executives who serve without salary. He is almost invariably available for conference in advance of submitting material to the Committee. His office adjoins that of the Association, so through the greater part of the year he can be consulted daily. Because of this circumstance the reports and recommendations which reach the Committee have already been through the process of conference and revision by the President and his staff.

The General Executive Committee under the by-laws meets quarterly. The Advisory Committee, a smaller body, by standing resolution meets monthly. Meetings alternate between Chicago and New York. All proper efforts are made to secure a full attendance. When it becomes known that a member will be absent we call upon him or otherwise seek an expression of his views upon the questions which are expected to come up. Usually letters and telegrams reaching us at the place of meeting enlarge the number of intelli-

gences actually brought to bear upon our decisions.

*Development of Policy*

Policies determined at meetings are ordinarily embodied in explicit language sanctioned as official. Policies determined in emergencies between meetings are arrived at by interview, mail, telegraph and telephone. It is expected that the draft of our utterances resulting from such an interchange will represent not only the suggestions actually received, but the ideas which members not accessible might have offered if reached. Indeed, the absent member of the Committee is always constructively present, his way of looking at things being familiar to the President and staff and an endeavor made to anticipate the line of thought which we believe he would deem important if there in the flesh. As new members come into the Committee their attiude and emphasis quickly become a part of the tradition and policy.

*Organization of Resources*

A project once authorized, it becomes the function of the staff to organize the resources of the Association for carrying it through to results.

It is a staff affair to know what those resources are. The influence of our members is mostly to be exerted upon



those whose acquaintance and confidence they have. We aim to tabulate this. To what organizations does a member belong? What friends has he in public life or in the press? We ask all the members these questions from time to time. The data is thus ready when occasion arises. We are aware precisely what each member is able and willing to do if invited.

In order to extend the number of towns in which co-operation is available, we bespeak the aid of those who represent member companies elsewhere than at the principal office. This larger circle takes in managers of branch and subsidiary plants and district sales managers. Where it proves agreeable, we enter into direct correspondence with their representatives. A couple of years ago the circular of one member to his agents gave us active co-operation in eleven western and southwestern states where before we had had none. In other cases the home office prefers to distribute our material to its representatives. One member has about 600 traveling salesmen who cover the United States. More than once he has transmitted our material to them and requested that they report the views of business men upon whom they call.

If in a certain town or district we have neither a member nor a member's representative, we write to a list of leading business men and ask their views. Among the replies is apt to be

one concurring with our ideas. To the writer we address a request for co-operation and add him to our list of good friends.

Thus step by step we construct our field map.

### *Co-operation by Individuals*

If we seek resolutions from business bodies, these friends of ours promote adoption in the organizations of which they are members. Often one of our members is President of some such Association, or a leading member.

If we think some event or utterance which we have brought about is news, our friends call the matter to the attention of editors and remind them that this is not to be classed as free advertising, which should only be published if paid for, but is more like the reports concerning the local business organizations in connection with community interests—that the community or trade which the publication serves has a stake in finding a solution of the problem under discussion.

If we wish to be sure that a certain member of Congress has read what we have to say, our friend, who is his friend, undertakes to ascertain for us either by calling upon him or by writing him a letter.

But in addition to what may be done for us by individuals in these ways, our Association makes its own direct approach to the business organization, to the press and to the member of Congress.



### *Intercourse with Associations*

In addressing secretaries of associations we do so from a list which is kept up to date. A card catalogue is maintained, and those not replying before a predetermined date are addressed again, and perhaps still again on the same matter. When replies contain objections to our proposition we carefully consider changing our language and often do so. The proposal to create regional sub-commissions, which was not a part of our original program of federal legislation, was added by the General Executive Committee in response to what we got from associations about the need for strengthening administration if the federal jurisdiction were to be enlarged.

If an association decides not to act, we address our material to its individual members. Most organizations publish a new list every year. Our card catalogue shows the approximate date for the appearance of this new list, and in due course we ask for it. We have found that returns are substantially larger in a town where our list gives the name of the executives instead of merely the name of the concern. We spend some energy every year in a return post card canvass to fill in the missing names. If a resolution is adopt-

ed we print the text and send this, together with one of our documents, to the members of that body. Sometimes the organization distributes the literature direct.

*Relations with the Press*

In sending matter to the press we adhere to certain practices which we have found desirable.

As an Association we never request the press to publish what is sent. We merely provide a convenient means of reporting our doings and sayings in case the editor thinks these will interest his readers. To avoid any appearance of trying to deceive editors about the length of our matter we set it up in type the same size and width as the average newspaper uses and mark by a numeral in the margin every 100 words. For the press every document is accompanied by an abstract usually not exceeding 800 words long. This is printed on only one side of the sheet. With it go two copies of the document itself, which is printed on both sides and must be in duplicate if the editor wants to cut up and paste. Two sets are sent—one to the news editor, the other to the chief editorial writer; and where we know his name we address him personally.

*Advance Abstracts*

For the annual dinner this evening we are to have two speakers. Their



names became known to me on the morning of Dec. 26. That day I wrote both of them stating that it would require 10 days to print advance abstracts and reach by mail the most distant dailies, and as the dinner was to be on Jan. 16, due day for manuscript would be Jan. 6. Hence I asked them for an appointment on Jan. 3 or 4, which was graciously accorded. On Jan. 3 I found one of the speakers had made a first draft from which together we made an abstract that afternoon. The next forenoon, Jan. 4, the second speaker sanctioned an abstract. Arriving in New York Friday morning, Jan. 5, I got to the printer 24 hours ahead of the game and the abstracts were mailed to the press of the country in confidence on Monday, Jan. 8, giving eight full days for delivery to the furthest points. Note by the sheet which I hold in my hand that there is no danger at this stage of jealousy between the two speakers; their abstracts are identical in length.

*The Best-Laid Plans——*

You should hear the bitter with the sweet. Let me tell you about a great stunt that went wrong. In 1912 one of our Committee suggested James J. Hill for a speaker on railway terminals. So I was dispatched to St. Paul, impressively accredited, and obtained an interview with the Empire Builder. He

expressed sympathy, but regretted that he had long before agreed to return with a party of friends from Europe at a certain time which would require his leaving America long before dinner time. I explained to him that the men who were administering the Railway Business Association were very busy men when they were busy at all and that their desire to have him as their speaker was no mere idle appetite to lionize a great man, but was based on their deliberate judgment that the prestige and influence of the organization would be promoted in a highly important way by having him make at that time in our pulpit one of his utterances. Finally Mr. Hill said: "I will not decline to-day. You will hear from me in about 10 days." Before the 10 days were gone we had heard, and the answer was that he had canceled his European trip and would be with us.

Mr. Hill's secretary told us afterwards that he had never known his chief to devote more attention to the preparation of a speech. That notable manuscript, which to-day is still a textbook in newspaper offices and elsewhere, was in my hands a full month before the date and the abstract was received by editors everywhere in ample season to be set up in advance of publication. I embraced myself affectionately as I looked forward to the harvest of publicity. I suppose there were not more than three or four events that



could have happened to prevent James J. Hill from filling space and taking tops of columns that next day, but one of those things did happen.

J. Pierpont Morgan on the afternoon of our meeting broke the silence of a life-time and talked at a Washington hearing three mortal newspaper pages. Everything else went by the board and even Mr. Hill found himself condensed in a corner of an inside page. It is not all sunshine and roses.

*Correspondence with Congressmen*

In writing direct to members of Congress we address them through their home post office during recess and at Washington during sessions. What we invite them to read occupies three short pages with the salient points played up in one-two-three order. We never ask support for our measures. We merely inquire what the Senator or Representative thinks, and request him to tell us what if anything he finds puzzling or repugnant in our proposals. Like other people, the law maker is about three or four times as likely to answer the second letter as the first, especially if the follow-up asks him whether he received the preceding.

*Research*

All this prosecution of the Committee's plans involves a large correspondence and research work. Our friends call upon us for statistics and other statements which they employ in

speeches, interviews, articles and correspondence.

*Conciliation*

A phase which the members as a whole have never heard anything about is our confidential exercise of good offices in promoting a better understanding where we encounter a controversy between a road and a citizen or community.

The other day a member wrote to ask whether we could help him get an embargo lifted so that he might resume receiving certain essential supplies. We sent a copy of his letter to the president of the railroad concerned, who instantly caused inquiry to be made, found that the request was reasonable, complied with it forthwith, and gave such satisfaction that we have on file for that member a letter of hearty thanks. The railroad president incidentally suggested to our correspondent that if he had applied to the railroad direct he could have saved time.

The last thing we want to do, of course, is to give the impression that we have influence with railroads and are in position to gain favors for people. We are not in that position and would think it mighty poor policy to use such influence if we had it. Correspondence of this kind is merely a part of our declared function of promoting co-operation and goodwill between the roads and the public. It was



not because this manufacturer was one of our members that we transmitted his letter, but because he was a member of the public. More often than not it is strangers who tell us their troubles and enlist our interest.

*Promotion of Conference*

Usually the circumstance arises out of our own work. One of our documents reaches a man who feels resentment over some situation affecting him and he writes us to the effect that he is not disposed to co-operate because he is angry. Perhaps it is an officer of an organization whose aid we have requested and who explains that the way is blocked by a controversy. Our job in such cases is to bring the complainant into amicable intercourse with the appropriate railway officer. Almost never does the dispute concern any matter which we as an Association have an opinion upon. We merely say to the railway, "Here is a situation which we have encountered in the course of our operations. It is obstructing our work. We would appreciate it if you could get together with our correspondent and see what can be done."

Sometimes it develops that a subordinate officer has misunderstood the policy of the railway company. Other times where the complaint comes from an association it turns out that the board of directors of the organization

regard the matter in question as secondary, and one which can be disposed of by negotiation without controversy or ill-feeling. Sometimes the road convinces the complainant that the condition is one which ought to stand as it is. In other cases an understanding is not reached and resort is had to litigation. In a surprising number of cases the status was not brought about by the roads at all, but is the result of a law or the decree of a commission.

*Obstacle only Apparent*

One of our members who had accomplished important results for us in certain organizations became involved in a controversy with a railway and at first felt that he and his friends would be obliged to discontinue their support of our measures. We promptly demonstrated to him that in point of fact we were the best friends he had in the world, since the measures advocated by us were aimed at the removal of precisely the type of situation by which he had been distressed. Consideration convinced him that this was true. He put some additional spice into the language and went to work in our behalf harder than ever.

In 99 out of 100 cases of all kinds a better understanding seems to result from our correspondence. We have yet to appeal to a railway which did not respond in the same spirit, and offer the complainant satisfaction, either by



modifying the condition or explaining fully why it should stand.

*Staff and the Members*

Staff work is mostly anonymous. Having no litigation to conduct we employ no lawyers, and confining our utterance to business experience, we require no special experts. Our spokesmen are our members and our friends.

The highest compliment any of you can pay the office is to complain that it asks you to do too many things. When this organization was formed a certain man, now dead, was recommended for the position of secretary. The member who proposed him said: "I am for him because I have been a member of his association and he was always asking me to do things." All the same we know that busy men are busier to-day than ever before. It is our constant study to reduce the number of requests for co-operation, to spread them through the year, and to make it easier for our friends to help by condensing what we say and simplifying the work which they are requested to undertake.

*Making Friends*

On the other hand we regard it as a compliment when our office is asked to do things. More and more we seem to have got on people's lists as a source of information. Many requests reach us

which indicate a misconception of our scope. We never shrink on that account from doing what we can; and when we find ourselves able on short notice to tap a reliable connection and help some stranger in a matter that is strictly none of our business we rejoice, because we may have made a friend.

We take warning from the story that they tell about Strode, the Western pioneer. He had entered a valley infested by Indians. "By the light of the setting sun," he says, "on the top of yonder hill I saw the hostile band. I did not know who they were, but they were gentlemen without hats, and I knew damn well they were no friends of mine." The Railway Business Association endeavors so to conduct itself that when it enters a valley it will be greeted with a smile of hospitality from somebody who has served us and is glad of it because he got a square deal or somebody whom we have had the good fortune to serve.

REQUESTS FOR COPIES of this pamphlet will be welcome from all those desiring to place it in the hands of their representatives or friends. Copies furnished or sent direct to lists upon application to Frank W. Noxon, Secretary Railway Business Association, 30 Church Street, New York.

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